

REPORT

OF

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

IN ANSWER

*To a resolution of the Senate calling for information as to the necessity of a fortification at Proctor's Landing, Louisiana.*

JULY 6, 1848.

Read, and ordered to be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT,  
Washington, July 6, 1848.

SIR: In answer to a resolution of the Senate of the 30th ultimo, requiring the Secretary of War "to report to the Senate whether or not a fortification at Proctor's Landing, on Lake Borgne, Louisiana, is necessary for the defence of New Orleans, and, if necessary, what sum is required to commence the work;" I have the honor to transmit herewith a report of the colonel of the corps of engineers, which is concurred in by this department.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. L. MARCY,  
Secretary of War.

Hon. GEORGE M. DALLAS,  
President of the Senate.

ENGINEER DEPARTMENT,  
Washington, July 5, 1848.

SIR: In answer to the call from the Senate of the 30th ultimo, received this day, as to "whether or not a fortification at Proctor's Landing, on Lake Borgne, Louisiana, is necessary to the defence of New Orleans, and, if necessary, what sum is required to commence the work;" I have the honor to state that the department has, at several different times, expressed its convictions as to the necessity of such a fort, and solicited early attention thereto.

May 22, 1845, the engineer department wrote the Secretary of War as follows:

"Proctor's Landing.—From this spot, at the bottom of Lake

\*Borgne, an excellent road leads to the city, a distance of about 30 miles. Some recent examinations and surveys show the necessity of a work of defence where this road strikes the shore of the lake, and I shall take leave to recommend that the executive urge an appropriation for that purpose at the next session of Congress."

In the annual report of this office, dated November 1, 1845, it is stated, as to Proctor's Landing: "From the landing above named to the city of New Orleans, a distance of about 28 miles, there is a beautiful road, one of the best in the State; and not a single obstacle, natural or artificial, now exists to prevent or impede an enemy, debarking at Proctor's, from marching troops of all kinds, with baggage and artillery, directly up to the city; and there is nothing, moreover, to prevent his reaching that landing place in boats. An expedition following this route would encounter none of the impediments which the English found to be nearly insurmountable in the route they followed in approaching the city. Why the defence of this avenue was not provided for in the system proposed by General Bernard, I have not been able to divine. At any rate, now that the other channels of approach are, for the most part, provided with adequate fortifications, this demands immediate attention. The defences should consist of an inaccessible tower of capacity sufficient to accommodate a small garrison, and an exterior battery, competent, by its fire, to prevent the approach of boats; for both which an estimate will accompany this report. It is presumed that Congress will not hesitate to grant the proper appropriation."

In a letter to the Secretary of War, December 27, 1845, it is stated: "Proctor's Landing is without defence; but, as an excellent road leads from this landing place directly to the city—distance 28 miles—it is of the first importance that it should be occupied without delay, and we only await the sanction of Congress. The defence should be a strong tower supported by a battery."

In a letter to the Secretary of War, February 27, 1846, the department had occasion to report as follows, in answer to a call from the Senate for information as to the project for defence at the place in question: "In the spring of 1841, on a personal examination made by me of the environs of New Orleans, I became satisfied that an avenue which had been entirely neglected, if not overlooked, was in fact one of the most practicable routes to the city, and one most easily availed of by an enemy. The attention of the government was accordingly directed to this circumstance, as well as to the probability that other undefended approaches might also exist, to settle which doubt an accurate reconnaissance was recommended of all that region. This reconnaissance, subsequent surveys of the particular locality, and an examination made by me in person, having confirmed the first impression, this department has two or three times, in its reports to the Secretary of War, repeated its views as to the necessity of a work at the point mentioned."

In a letter to the same functionary, April 3, 1846: "Next, at the southern end of Lake Borgne, is Proctor's Landing, from which point a good road conducts to the city. Works have been projected

for the defence here, but their erection has not yet been authorized by Congress. They should be begun and finished as soon as possible."

The above quotations are given to show the opinions on this subject, entertained for several years, in this department, and the anxious desire to secure their favorable consideration by the government.

I have now only to add that a grant, at the present session, of thirty thousand dollars, for the proposed tower and battery, would be regarded as a very important contribution to the security of the city of New Orleans, enabling us to enter very effectively upon the commencement of the work.

The resolution is herewith returned.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your most obedient,

JOS. G. TOTTEN,  
*Colonel and Chief Engineer.*

Hon. W. L. MARCY,  
*Secretary of War.*

